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CHAFEE EFFORTS LEAD TO \$1.7 MILLION FOR BLOCK ISLAND LAND PURCHASE

27-Acre Parcel to Be Added to Block Island National Wildlife Refuge

PROVIDENCE, RI – U.S. Senator Lincoln Chafee today announced that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has agreed to a categorical exclusion, thereby allowing the agency to spend \$1.7 million to purchase a key parcel of undeveloped land on Block Island.

The 27-acre Boas Wash Pond property contains important shrub and wetland habitat, and serves as a feeding ground for a number of migratory birds. Once purchased, the property will become part of the Block Island National Wildlife Refuge.

Although the FWS had agreed to purchase the property in September, final acquisition of the pond had been delayed by a requirement that the Service first complete a Comprehensive Conservation Plan. Senator Chafee intervened to obtain an exclusion from this requirement, thus helping to expedite the release of the required federal funds.

“Open space on Block Island is an increasingly rare commodity, and the Service and its partners must move quickly to protect and preserve what is left,” said Senator Chafee. “This purchase helps fuel local conservation efforts, and ensures that Block Island’s valuable wildlife habitat will be preserved for future generations.”

“By bringing federal funds to the local community, the Block Island Conservancy can protect open space on the island and place these lands into the Refuge system,” Chafee continued.

Officials from several organizations praised Senator Chafee’s concern for the project, as well as his positive efforts to ensure prompt disbursement of the funding.

Charlie Vandermoer, Rhode Island Refuge Manager for the Fish and Wildlife Service, noted the importance of the conservation project. “We appreciate Senator Chafee’s long standing support for wildlife conservation, and for making this land protection possible. The

Boas Wash Pond tract will significantly add important wildlife habitat to the National Wildlife Refuge System. Over 250 different species occur in the area, making this land an important contribution to Wildlife Conservation.”

Block Island Conservancy President Read Kingsbury said that his organization was pleased to partner with the Fish and Wildlife Service to protect open space on Block Island. “Senator Chafee’s involvement helped move this project forward,” said Kingsbury. “Just like his father, Senator Lincoln Chafee is a real friend to Block Island.”

Dennis Wolkoff, The Nature Conservancy’s Vice President in Boston, said that this property adds a key link to the Block Island National Wildlife Refuge. Many partners including the Conservation Fund and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have contributed to protecting this tract. “Special recognition should go to the leadership of Senator Lincoln Chafee and the Block Island Conservancy for their role in protecting this place with its rare and endangered plants and animals.”

Background to Purchase

In a deal initiated by the Nature Conservancy, the Fish and Wildlife Service agreed on September 6, 2001, to purchase the land from the Block Island Conservancy, a grass-roots non-profit organization committed to the preservation of open space on the island. Proceeds of the transaction will then be used by the Block Island Conservancy to purchase additional unprotected land on the island.

Unfortunately, actual purchase of the property was delayed by a federal requirement that FWS approve a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP), expected to occur February, 2002. Required under the 1997 National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, the CCP includes management activities at each refuge, as well as a detailed land account of FWS’s future land acquisition plans.

On May 18th, Senator Chafee wrote to Mamie Parker, Regional Director of the FWS Northeast Regional Office, to request a “categorical exclusion” from this requirement, which would allow the prompt allocation of the funding. In his letter, the Senator noted that, “While I understand the Service’s desire to ensure that all land purchases are compatible with the CCP, I believe that the special circumstances surrounding the BIC property justify pursuing a categorical exclusion as a means of expediting the process.”

In response to the Senator’s letter, the Fish and Wildlife Service Northeast Regional Office processed a categorical exclusion for review by the Fish and Wildlife Service’s National Office. The National Office recently approved the Northeast Regional Office’s categorical exclusion request.

Funding for the project comes from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, federal dollars generated primarily from royalties on oil drilling and gas exploration, and dedicated to the acquisition of lands at the federal, state and local levels.